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Siefkes unhappy with EPA response

Couple concerned with incomplete effort within home

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Ray and Trudy Siefke feel they have been getting a "bureaucratic cold shoulder" from the Environmental Protection Agency.

Neither Kuo Environmental Services, a cleanup contractor for the EPA, or EPA officials have responded to the couple's concerns about the condition of their home following an extensive cleanup for toxic asbestos fibers.

Paul Peronard, who had been scheduled to meet with the Siefkes on Jan. 24 but cancelled, said Friday night he would have someone contact them this week.

"I just want to let the public know how they will be treated when their house is cleaned," Ray said. "They promised us when we came back we'd be moving into a new house, or practi-



Trudy and Ray Siefke sit at their dining room table last week. "This is not the showcase poster child place," Trudy said sitting at her dining room table last week.

cally new. When we came back it looked like a demolition crew had been here."

He compared it to "having a bunch of pack rats in the house."

Early last year the EPA had identified the Siefkes' property off Highway 2 South as contaminated with asbestos-tainted vermiculite. Ray had gone to the EPA concerned about the information he was hearing, especially since he had already been diagnosed with asbestos.

In early fall the elderly couple were moved to a temporary residence while the federal agency began a massive cleanup of the grounds and the interior of the Siefke home.

"This is not the showcase poster child place," Trudy said sitting at her dining room table last week.

"I'm very unhappy over the deal," said Ray, who strains for a breath with near

See Siefkes on Page 2

Siefkes

Continued from Page 1
ly every word. He never worked for W.R. Grace. "I'm trying to keep from getting somebody in the damn deep of trouble."

The Siefkes moved out of their home as Kuo began cleaning up the asbestos contamination on the surrounding property. The asbestos-laden vermiculite had come off of various trucks and pieces of machinery Siefke had purchased over the years from Grace, which mined the vermiculite northeast of Libby for just under 30 years. The toxic tremolite asbestos fibers were then tracked into the Siefkes' home.

They moved out in late August and the cleanup began in earnest.

"I took my clothes, the coffee pot and some kettles," Trudy said. "Everything else was going to be cleaned." For three months, the Siefkes lived in a double-wide trailer about a mile from their property, which was surrounded with a chain-link fence and locked gates. The EPA picked up their rent on the trailer and is continuing to pay the boarding fees for their horses.

Much of the machinery and vehicles on the property were removed as were wooden additions to the steel outbuildings. Soil was removed and replaced.

In the house, the Siefkes belongings were tossed in boxes or bags and taped shut.

"They jerked the bedding off the beds and jammed them into plastic bags," Trudy said. "They did that with the clothes from all the closets."

"What they didn't know what to do with they put in a box in the attic."

When the Siefkes moved back into their home in November, there was a small mountain of bags piled in a corner of the living room. Everything else was still in taped boxes.

The carpet had yet to be replaced and Trudy, her son and a friend of her son had to put down subflooring in the kitchen area before the carpet layers would come in. The EPA picked up the tab for the carpet and flooring materials.

"Look at this," Trudy said from a doorway in the living room. "You see the duct tape residue on the edges of the trim. See here. Staples are still in the wood paneling."

"Ray was so mad," she said. "I'm still mad," he said from his chair at the dining room table.

Trudy wants to know why staples were used in her hardwood kitchen cabinets to hold up plastic, why staples holding up the plastic were left in wall paneling throughout the house and why the words Room #1, Room #2 and Room #3 had been scratched into the wood casing trim above three bed-

room doors.

The finish and stain on the wood ceilings is coming off and the finish and stain on the window casements has also been damaged, she said.

When the work crews ripped up the carpets, they splintered the wall paneling in nearly every room, Trudy said.

Also, two lamp shades, a wall painting and a collection of large paper-thin wasps nests, that had been hanging from the ceiling, were all damaged beyond repair.

Ray has submitted a list of 54 items to the EPA that are gone and for which he wants reimbursement. He also wants compensation for the strain and stress that he and Trudy have gone through. The total comes to about \$15,000.

Peronard said he is aware of the Siefkes' concerns and he thought he had an agreement with the couple that everything would be taken care of when cleanup crews came back in the spring to rebuild the barn and replace corral fencing.

"We need to compensate them for everything that was lost and everything damaged during the cleanup," Peronard said.

He said all items in the house were cleaned as they came out of the house and stored.

"Normally, what you would prefer to do is throw it all out and cost them out," Peronard

said. "But they had a lot of keepsakes."

He admitted the Siefkes home wasn't in as good shape when they returned as it had been.

Trudy's frustration is that workers for the cleanup crew spent hours documenting all of the Siefkes belongings. She has five thick ringed notebooks full of photos and descriptions of personal property that Kuo put together.

"I don't know how many hours were spent on this," she said. "It got to the point where you don't care. They took all these pictures of everything. Why didn't they use them to put everything back?"

The EPA is asking for a health emergency declaration that would give the agency the authority to remove vermiculite insulation from homes and commercial buildings in Libby. The EPA has said they will only remove the insulation when people request it.

The Siefkes didn't have insulation removed from their home. The contamination was tracked in on clothing and shoes from the surrounding yard.

Ray warned people to make extensive lists and videotape everything in the house.

"The whole thing didn't make sense," Ray said. "When we walked in from the rental and saw this, I was fighting mad. I'm still mad."